



Photo by Sgt. Monica R. Garreau, 17th Public Affairs Detachment, 25th Infantry Division

Experts' guidance helps set up soldiers for success at PLDC

By Sgt. Jimmy Norris

For NCOs the strict inspections and late-night floor buffings of the Primary Leadership Development Course are things of the past. But being a PLDC graduate doesn't necessarily mean you're done with the course. While you no longer need to worry about wall locker inspections, the challenges of the NCO Education System's first step still await your soldiers and they are counting on you to set them up for success.

Senior leaders from the NCO academies at Fort Bliss, Texas; Fort Stewart, Ga.; Fort Sill, Okla.; and Camp Jackson, Korea, offer a wealth of information that will help PLDC students regardless of where they attend the course. From drill and ceremony to land navigation, five experts give their insider views on what soldiers need to know before they go.

"When soldiers are notified that they'll be attending PLDC, they need to get with their Schools NCO or get on the Internet and get a copy of the student guide," said Master Sgt. Jimmie Nelson, chief instructor of PLDC at the Fort Bliss NCO Academy.

The Fort Bliss NCO Academy is the first academy in the Army to be accredited as an Institute of Excellence, the highest level of Army accreditation.

According to Nelson, student guides, which can be accessed through most NCO academies' Web sites, contain all of

the information a student needs to learn the standards and expectations.

With a student guide, prospective students can get a headstart on school policies, packing lists, standards and course requirements.

Command Sgt. Maj. Carl McPherson, commandant of the Fort Sill, Okla., NCO Academy, also stressed the importance of reading the student guides.

"There's no secret about what a soldier is going to do at PLDC," he said. "Everything he'll need to know is in there, but too often leaders and soldiers wait until [the soldier] gets to PLDC to find out what the requirements are."

Another step in preparation, said Nelson, is to attend a PLDC graduation. Attending a PLDC graduation gives future students a chance to learn about the school from soldiers who just completed the course.

"The key is to talk to someone who recently went to PLDC. Talking to someone who went 10 or 15 years ago is good, but not as good," said Nelson. Attending a graduation also gives soldiers a chance to familiarize themselves with the area where they'll attend PLDC.

Going over the packing list is another important step in PLDC preparation.

"The two biggest shortcomings [in preparation for PLDC] are the notification process and the inspection of items on the packing list," said Master Sgt. Daniel Adle, chief of PLDC, 8th Army NCO Academy, Camp Jackson. "Soldiers are sometimes notified as [late] as 36 hours prior. Too often, units fill out a pre-execution checklist without conducting a thorough inspection of the soldier's equipment."

Nelson said supervisors should begin looking over their soldiers' clothing inventories as far in advance of the class date as possible. In addition to supervisors inspect-

ing the items, Nelson recommended employing a recent PLDC graduate as a sponsor because he or she is more likely to know what will be acceptable to the academy's instructors.

In addition to having all of their equipment squared away, PLDC students also need to make sure their personal affairs are in order prior to attendance.

"They need to make sure the rent's going to get paid and the family will be taken care of. They shouldn't have any appointments scheduled during PLDC," said Nelson. "They're here for school and it's important that they don't have any [distractions]." In order to cut down on distractions each soldier should have a sponsor from his unit to help take care of things at home and at the unit so the soldiers can focus on training.

"Sponsors need to make sure soldiers have the proper equipment. They need to make sure the soldier has been counseled and they need to make sure soldiers get the information about the course," said 1st Sgt. Randy Ray, chief of PLDC at Fort Stewart NCO Academy. "Sponsors are also personally responsible for helping soldiers with any unit or family problems that come up during the course."

When packing for PLDC, soldiers should remember that clothing and equipment should be clean and serviceable, but doesn't necessarily need to be new. Soldiers will need two pairs of combat boots, which Nelson said should be broken in prior to attendance.

One of the most common deficiencies soldiers have the first day of PLDC is the fit of their dress uniforms, Nelson said. "A lot of soldiers haven't worn their dress uniforms in a while. They may have gained or lost weight," he explained.

Soldiers also need to bring enough personal items – including deodorant, soap and laundry detergent – to last 30 days because there is no guarantee they'll have the opportunity to resupply once the course begins.

Should a soldier have deficiencies in his pre-execution checklist, he'll have 72 hours to correct them. If the deficiencies remain uncorrected after the allotted time, the soldier may be dropped from the course.

"The reason we have that 72-hour time limit is that we need to get on with the instruction. It's very structured and it's very fast paced," Nelson said.

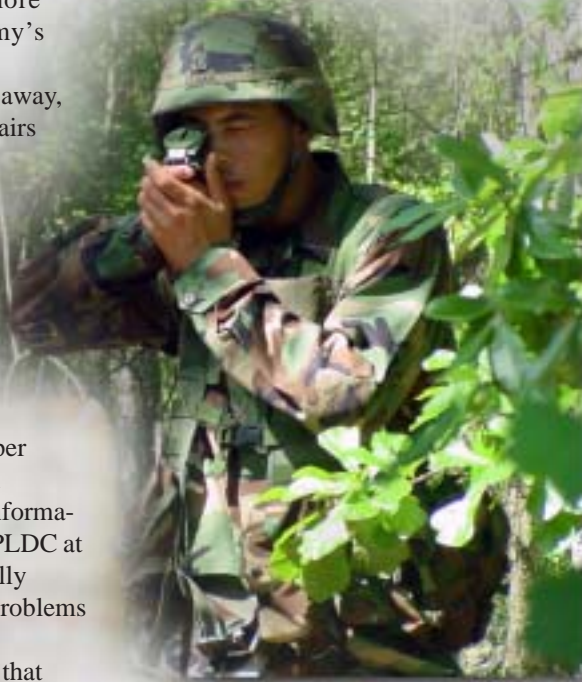


Photo by Staff Sgt. Ron Sanders, Fort Stewart NCO Academy

A PLDC student tests on the land navigation course at the Fort Stewart NCO Academy.

Soldiers also need to train on some of the tasks they'll study at PLDC. According to Adle, the three major areas on which pre-PLDC training should focus are: map reading and land navigation, drill and ceremony and conducting physical fitness training. (See related boxes).

The Fort Stewart NCO Academy had a 98-percent graduation rate

over the past 12 months, according to Sgt. Maj. Michael Peterson at the U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy Quality Assurance Office (QAO). The QAO is responsible for accrediting schools in the NCOES. Ray believes they have such a high success rate in part because of a map reading and land navigation tutorial they use. Each academy offers soldiers tutorials and practice materials to help them prepare.

Map reading and land navigation are the hardest things to bring a soldier up to speed on, said Sgt. 1st Class David Collins, a senior PLDC instructor at the Fort Bliss NCO Academy.

"It's critical that soldiers receive 40 hours of map reading and land navigation training prior to PLDC," he said. "We start [drill and ceremony] and physical fitness training early on and go a couple of weeks [before testing]." Soldiers do a combined 20 hours of map reading and land nav training.

Map reading and land navigation

- Identify topographic symbols on a map.
- Identify terrain features on a map.
- Determine Grid Coordinates of a point on a map.
- Determine a magnetic azimuth using a lensatic compass.
- Determine the elevation of a point on the ground using a map.
- Measure distance on a map.
- Convert azimuths.
- Orient a map using a lensatic compass.
- Orient a map to the ground by using map-terrain association.
- Locate an unknown point on a map and the ground by intersection.
- Locate an unknown point on a map and the ground by resection.
- Determine direction without a compass.

Army physical fitness

- Put the formation in the extended rectangular formation.
- Conduct warm-up for five to seven minutes focusing on muscles targeted.
- Lead the exercise session.
- Conduct cool-down.

Nelson said it's important for soldiers to go to a land navigation course and train prior to PLDC. If a land navigation course is unavailable, he recommended setting one up using the guidelines found in Chapter 14, FM 3-25.26, *Map Reading and Land Navigation*.

McPherson stressed the importance of ensuring soldiers actually find points on the ground with a compass.

"We've had soldiers come here who haven't picked up a compass since basic training," he said. "They can plot points on a map, but when they get [to the land navigation course], they don't know what they're looking at."

Nelson said soldiers scheduled to attend PLDC should conduct physical fitness training for their platoon or company before attending. They should also consult FM 21-20, *Physical Fitness Training*, to ensure they are familiar with a variety of exercises and know the proper names for each.

Soldiers should consult FM 3-21.5, *Drill and Ceremonies*, and practice marching other soldiers in their units. "Soldiers should already have a basic understanding of how to march when they get to PLDC," added McPherson. "They may not know how to move a squad but they should have a basic understanding of drill movements and one- and two-part commands."

"Let soldiers take charge of a formation and conduct basic facing movements," said Adle. "First-line supervisors should conduct an after-action review after the soldier has conducted the training to identify mistakes and how to correct them."

Training Support Packages (TSPs) for each of the PLDC tasks can be found on the U.S. Army Sergeants Major Acad-

Drill and ceremony

Drill and ceremony is tested by marching a squad-sized formation. In addition to the commands, students are also graded on cadence and command voice.

- Fall In
- Present Arms
- Order Arms
- Parade Rest
- Stand-at-Ease
- At Ease
- Rest
- Left Face
- Right Face
- About Face
- Column Left
- Column Right
- Column Half Right
- Column Half Left
- Left Flank
- Right Flank
- Rear March
- Left Step
- Right Step
- Dismiss the Squad

emy Web site at <http://usasma.bliss.army.mil>. From the "Training and Doctrine" menu, click on "PLDC." From there, go to "AC (Active Component) Courseware" where you will find the new courseware.

Command Sgt. Maj. Albert D. Newton, commandant of the Fort Stewart NCO Academy, believes effective counseling is also key to preparing a soldier for PLDC. "All soldiers have different strengths and weaknesses. Counseling a soldier effectively tells

them where [his or her] strengths and weaknesses are and what [he or she] needs to do to improve. Since counseling is

two-way, it also gives the soldier a chance to tell his [NCO]

what he needs work on. A soldier is his own best manager. He knows the areas where he needs work and he'll say so," said Newton.

All of the commandants and instructors said that NCOs should start training soldiers long before the soldier hits the PLDC order

of merit list.

"[The training] has to be part of an established program that builds on what soldiers learn in [advanced individual training]," said McPherson. "We need to take these young [privates first class and specialists] and show them how to do inspections and evaluations and expose them to the things junior leaders are dealing with. You also need to set up lanes for common tasks since all of this will tie into a unit's [Mission Essential Task List] anyway."

"Ultimately, what you want to do is increase the soldier's confidence level," said Newton. "You want him to go into PLDC knowing he can [perform the required tasks]."



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PLDC train-up tips from the experts

Tips on training

Master Sgt. Daniel Adle, chief of PLDC, 8th Army NCO Academy, Camp Jackson, Korea, has a wealth of advice to give on preparing soldiers for PLDC, including methods for training many of the tasks soldiers will perform during the course.

Leaders should conduct an assessment of the soldier's abilities to determine what tasks need the most training and what refresher training is needed prior to attendance at PLDC, Adle said.

Land navigation

Units must conduct training on basic map reading techniques found in FM 3-25.26, *Map Reading and Land Navigation*. He recommends units set up a land navigation course in the local training area that stresses intersections, resections, back azimuths, and terrain association.

Drill and ceremony

Let soldiers take charge of a formation and conduct basic facing movements. First-line supervisors should conduct an after-action review after the soldier has conducted the training to identify mistakes and how to correct them.

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During Sergeant's Time Training, supervisors should be giving the future NCOs classes on troop-leading procedures and combat orders. During a Field Training Exercise, allow soldiers to conduct a check on learning by allowing them to issue a combat order and be actively involved during all phases of troop-leading procedures. First-line supervisors should conduct an after-action review after the training event to identify strengths, weakness and ways to improve.

The classroom environment

Unit leadership should enroll all future PLDC students into the following correspondence course: Primary Leadership Subjects – Army Correspondence Course Program Course Number: 553BD21 is the first course targeted for soldiers who are ready to attend the Primary Leadership Development Course.

Inspections

Let individual soldiers conduct inspections at least once a week. Leaders should use FM 3-21.5, *Drill and Ceremonies*, as a guide.

Leadership assessments

Commanders and first sergeants must ensure thorough developmental counseling is being done to standard in accordance with FM 22-100, *Army Leadership*.

